



**TO:** Project SEARCH Skills Trainers  
OVR Staff  
School Districts  
Project SEARCH Host Businesses  
County MH/ID Offices

**FROM:** Shannon Austin, Executive Director  
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

**RE:** Guidance for the 2020-2021 school year to OVR staff, providers and schools on Project SEARCH services during a period of state mandated mitigation strategies for slowing the spread of Coronavirus Disease - 2019 (COVID-19)

**ISSUED:** 9/16/2020

**EFFECTIVE:** Immediately

**DISCUSSION:** The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is committed to providing quality services to Pennsylvanians with disabilities. During this unprecedented time, the health and safety of our customers, staff and community partners remain our top priority. All Commonwealth businesses should follow the most recent guidance issued by the Governor's Office. Please reference the [Responding to COVID-19 in Pennsylvania Guide](#) for updated information. Please visit [the Department of Community & Economic Development's \(DCED's\)](#) website for resources for businesses affected by COVID-19, along with a current list of businesses allowed to operate and the waiver/exemption form (if applicable).

Partners are encouraged to stay connected by frequently checking [the National Project SEARCH member portal](#) for updated information on the impact of COVID-19 and FAQs regarding COVID-19 and Project SEARCH program sites. During this time, Project SEARCH will be handled as follows in accordance with the Governor's current directives (as of this document's publication date).

1. If the county where the Project SEARCH site (host business) is returns to the red phase, providers should not attempt to develop new experiences out in the community.
2. If the Project SEARCH orientation is held virtually, use this COVID-19 specific service code: PSPPC1. This code will need to be added to CWDS. If orientation was already held virtually and the District Office set up the service authorization using the regular code (PSPP1), you do not need to change it.
3. If schools do not return to in-person classes; if there are no onsite rotation

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options due to the host business not allowing interns onsite; or if there are no integrated community rotation options but virtual lessons and discussions occur in place of Rotation 1, 2 and/or 3, the Skills Trainer may provide virtual job exploration at the same rate as Phase 2, 3 and 4 using these corresponding COVID-19 specific service codes: PSPPC2, PSPPC3 or PSPPC4. Job Exploration is expected at a minimum of 5 hours per week to each student (services may be provided in groups or individually). The Job Exploration services provided by the Skills Trainer must be a separate and distinct service from the instruction provided by the school; OVR will not pay PSPPC2, PSPPC3 or PSPPC4 for a skills trainer to participate in the regular virtual classroom instruction. **Services are not intended to supplant those required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) nor repeat or supplant services as previously provided under IDEA.**

- a. To do so, the following is required and must be uploaded in the provider's CWDS business folder:
  - i. If the Skills Trainer is not a current provider for Job Exploration, or if they choose to revise their current job exploration curriculum, then the Skills Trainer must submit an outline that details the job exploration curriculum and includes daily lesson plans to be provided virtually by the Job Skills Trainer (of no more than 5 pages) to the District Office (DO) that oversees the Project SEARCH site. Please contact Melissa Wert-Thrush if you need ideas or resources for curriculum.
  - ii. Prior to changing to or beginning virtual services, the provider must have written documentation from the DO agreeing to virtual services. This may be documented in a purchase order or email that is uploaded in the provider's business folder in CWDS.
  - iii. The provider must have documentation indicating the availability of an appropriate non-public facing remote communication product to instruct students (Zoom, Skype, an LEA specific online learning platform, etc.). This documentation can be in the form of a copy of the purchase receipt of a software license from the provider or an email from the school district and should be uploaded in the provider's business folder in CWDS.
  - iv. The District Office will add the specialized service code(s) to the provider in CWDS, and Melissa will approve the service code(s) after review. **The service code request does not go through the resource account; the DO should send an email directly to Melissa once all the required documentation is uploaded into CWDS.**
  - v. If a Skills Trainer provided virtual services for Rotation 3 for the 2019-2020 school year and no changes are being made, then the provider only needs to obtain approval from the DO

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- agreeing to virtual services, if appropriate for the 2020-2021 school year. Also, the DO will need to add the specific service code(s) into CWDS and submit the request to Melissa for approval.
- b. VocFit may be incorporated into the job exploration curriculum.
  - c. The onsite rotations at the host business are the preferred method of service delivery or, if deemed necessary, at a competitive integrated site. Should school district, state and/or federal guidelines prohibit on-site delivery of service, virtual job exploration can be considered.
  - d. The Skills Trainer must be present during virtual sessions. Pre-recorded sessions, concurrent sessions and/or stand-alone online curriculum are not allowable provider services.
  - e. Once instruction is scheduled, the provider must forward an invitation or login instructions to the OVR District Office Project SEARCH point of contact so that OVR staff may monitor services remotely on an as-needed basis. Providers are also encouraged to take attendance and record sessions for later viewing to verify the receipt of services.
  - f. All materials must be accessible, and accommodations must be provided to students who need them. No person with a disability shall, on the basis of the disability, be excluded from participation in virtual service(s) if available.
  - g. To avoid Period of Performance violations, the service authorization must be set up prior to the service being provided.
  - h. Billing must also include a report of students that includes attendance statistics such as time(s) logged in and the amount of time active.
4. Payments must be prorated for incomplete phases. If an invoice was paid but the service was not completed, the provider must submit a refund to OVR.
  5. Guidance from the National Project SEARCH office indicates that a student can complete the program after their 2<sup>nd</sup> Rotation/Phase 3, so it may be appropriate for interns to seek permanent employment and not participate in a 3<sup>rd</sup> Rotation/Phase 4. This should be decided on a case-by-case basis by each steering committee.
  6. If school does not permit in-person instruction for the 2020-2021 school year, upon completion of Rotation 2/Phase 3, a virtual Employment Planning meeting should be scheduled with the IEP team for each intern, and the team should review the intern's situation and choose 1 of the following options:
    - a. Intern will transition to OVR Business Services and begin virtual job search activities with DO Business Services staff. Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 are not authorized or paid.
    - b. Intern has a job offer, but it is placed on hold because of COVID-19. Up to 3 months of offsite mentoring may be authorized using PSPPC5 at a rate of \$350 per month to follow up with student, assist with job orientation and/or paperwork, and support student while awaiting a start date. Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 would be paid at employment outcomes outlined in the administrative memos.

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- c. Intern will skip the in-person Rotation 3/Phase 4. If the intern and VRC agree, the intern may make the informed choice to search for permanent employment as normal. They may either work with the Skills Trainer to obtain permanent employment utilizing Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 or they may transition to Supported Employment (SE) by completing a Supported Employment Support Plan (SE000).
  - d. Intern and VRC decide to delay permanent employment; they may begin limited virtual job search activities (e.g., resume development, interview practice) using PSPPC5 at \$350/month for 3 months.
  - e. Intern will delay job development activities and plan to return to Project SEARCH and complete Rotation 3/Phase 4 when the host business returns to normal operations in the summer or fall 2020 (with permission from the host business and approval from the education partner). This should be recorded in the student's IEP. Project SEARCH Phases 5 and 6 would continue as normal once the student completes Phase 4.
  - f. Intern will delay job development activities and plan to participate in a Paid Work Experience (PWE) when businesses return to normal operations. Services would be authorized as instructed in the provider's PETS Provider Agreement. Once the PWE is completed, then Phases 5 and 6 would be authorized.
7. If the Skills Trainer or host site for an adult Project SEARCH is closed, intern may utilize options identified above in 5 a-e.
  8. If a phase is initiated using virtual Job Exploration and an onsite rotation becomes an option prior to the completion of the virtual service, the IEP team is encouraged to meet to discuss the next steps prior to moving from virtual to onsite rotation. Billing must align with authorized services.
  9. OVR may discontinue the allowance of virtual services at any time at the discretion of our executive director. A 30-day notice will be issued to all providers if these services are discontinued.
  10. Methods of intern selection for the 2021-2022 school year will be determined on an individualized basis. OVR staff should follow previous guidance on the referral of interns in status 02 or 11.

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